



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

compose her features, and move with a staid step. The troubles and perplexities of real life, homely passions and griefs, were banished from the canvas, and of course the studied refinement and chastened grace of such compositions required a language of their own, a sustained and dainty diction limited in scope, but exquisitely tempered. Now, Victor Hugo's example has gone far to dethrone such principles and models. In the "Legend of the Ages" there is a miscellany of themes, and a variety of treatment which is shocking to those conservative men of letters who take their cue from Boileau, and keep alive a reverence for what they call the "language of the gods." No doubt much of the raw material worked over in these volumes comes from what "classicists" esteem the legitimate storehouse, namely, from Greek myths and Roman chronicles; but their distinctive merit is that the author seems equally able to detect some flute-notes of beauty amid the crash and discords of daily life, and that what oppressed Racine, for instance, — the rush and scramble of interests, the jostlings and trappings of the street, smoke of market and din of forum, — seem powerless to tease or cloud his spirit. The result is that even the levities, quips, and follies which were interdicted by that demure and fastidious mistress, the classic Muse, have been welcomed back by the apostle of romanticism. In a word, the faults not less than the felicities of Victor Hugo, considered as an artist, are the inevitable outgrowth of his method. He is not always successful in borrowing from Nature her bizarre effects of light and shade, or in compelling as she compels the trivial to relieve or heighten the sublime. He sometimes carries too far the hint that nonchalance is the refinement of artifice. And finally, his canvas undoubtedly reveals the latent powers of the grotesque, which, as he somewhere tells us, is "leagued on one side with terror, and clinging on the other to the tendrils of pity," but he does not always perceive that at its feet yawns a gulf which we call bathos.

5. — *History of French Literature*. By HENRI VAN LAUN. Part II.

From the Classical Renaissance to the Reign of Louis the Fourteenth.
New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1877. 2 vols. pp. 392.

THE first part of this History, which we noticed in our January issue, extended from the origin of French literature to the Classical Renaissance. The second, lately published, extends from the Renaissance to the close of the reign of Louis the Fourteenth; and a third will probably complete the subject, bringing it down to the present time.

Mr. Henri Van Laun enjoys peculiar advantages for executing the task

he has undertaken, and in part performed so well. The first of these advantages consists in his not being by birth a Frenchman. This fact is indicated by his name and by the style of his book, which is not French, as a comparison of the work of M. Taine, which he translated so admirably, with this original production of his own will show. The inveterate tendency of Frenchmen to regard everything French as the best of its kind would have rendered impartiality like Van Laun's impossible. We presume that few Frenchmen would have so freely acknowledged certain points of inferiority in his own race that are exposed in the historical sketch of the Celts or Gauls, which Mr. Van Laun has prefixed to his "*History of French Literature.*" This guaranty for a fair account of the merit and influence of the writings which he had to pass in review is certainly no mean vantage-ground.

Another peculiarity of the French people is their small success in the acquirement of foreign languages. Whether their inferiority as linguists arises from natural incapacity, or from contempt of other languages in comparison with their own, the fact is certain that in no other nation of Europe do we find so few, even among educated men, who can speak in any tongue but that of France. On the other hand, we find that the Teutonic and Sclavic races of the European continent have a facility in the acquisition of languages greater than that of the English and the Americans, and very much greater than that of Frenchmen. Now, in the absence of more reliable proof, Mr. Van Laun's remarkable proficiency, both in French and English, goes far to convince us that he is not of Celtic or Gallic extraction. But, however this may be, his familiarity with French and English is a second advantage, whose importance cannot well be overrated. Notwithstanding all pretences to the contrary, we agree in an opinion which has been ascribed to Ralph Waldo Emerson, that an Englishman or an American gains a better knowledge of any foreign writer from a good translation — such, for example, as those of our author — than from his own perusal of the original. Accordingly, when we perceive that Mr. Van Laun's knowledge of French is as perfect as that of an educated Frenchman, we feel further assured that, other things being equal, he is able to give us a better history of French literature than if he was less at home in the language in which it is written. Moreover, his thorough knowledge of English enables him to think in English, and to furnish spirited and accurate translations of all the passages which he quotes in illustration. To most English readers this is a positive boon, as M. Taine's translation of English quotations into pure French must be even a greater boon to the people of France.

Mr. Van Laun's notion of literary history is that it forms an integral

part of the civil history of nations. "The history of a literature is the history of a people; if not this, it is worthless. To know merely what books have been written, and who wrote them, is to know a number of dry facts which may encumber the mind but cannot inform it. To know what our predecessors and our contemporaries have written and thought, to throw ourselves into the mood of an author, assimilate his work, comprehend and develop his meaning, to make a literary production our own, so as to have the power of reproducing it at our pleasure, without at the same time being familiar with the circumstances under which it was first conceived, and the annals of the age in which it saw the light, — this is impossible." Following out this conception, he interweaves with the political and ecclesiastical history of France the history of the chief authors of each period and of their works, explaining the origin, estimating the merit, and valuing the influence of these works, — in a word, bringing into full view the literature of the nation as a necessary factor in the national existence.

The period embraced in the part now under consideration is, perhaps, the most important in French history. It includes what has been termed the Augustan age of French letters. It begins with the Jesuits and the League, and closes with the reign of Louis the Fourteenth, including the lives and writings of all the celebrated poets, dramatists, orators, moralists, and philosophers of the *Grande Nation*, — Ronsard, Malherbe, Corneille, Brantôme, Sully, St. Francis of Sales, Pascal, Madame Sevigné, Mademoiselle de Scudery, Richelieu, Descartes, Molière, La Fontaine, Scarron, La Rochefoucauld, Boileau, Racine, Malesbranche, and La Bruyère, and the pulpit orators Bossuet, Bourdaloue, Fénelon, Massillon, and Saurin, together with a hundred others of less celebrity.

In conclusion, the fact that Van Laun is the translator from the French of Taine's "History of English Literature" almost forces on us a comparison of their respective works. To young men Taine must be the most fascinating, to men of mature years Van Laun must be the most satisfactory. Taine's style is characterized by splendor, yet it is the splendor of clouds, delighting while bewildering; Van Laun's is solid and perspicuous, affecting no gorgeous speculation, and venturing on no transcendental theories. His feet are continually on the ground, and we can follow him whithersoever he goes. There is no such hypothesis in his work as that Hamlet was a partial development of Shakespeare himself, or that Milton, the republican, the Puritan, and the regicide, borrowed the scenery of his celestial court from the palace of the Stuarts, — the abode of "Bacchus and his revellers," — by whose persecution driven "old, poor, sightless, and disgraced, he re-

tired to his hovel to die." Van Laun's book, as we have said, is not French, although it is an excellent and interesting history of French literature.

-
6. — *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century.* By LESLIE STEPHEN. In two Volumes. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1877. 8vo. pp. 482, 481.

THIS elaborate work was suggested directly, as Hunt's "Religious Thought in England" was indirectly, by Dr. Pattison's remarkable paper in "Essays and Reviews" on the "Tendencies of Religious Thought in England between the Years 1688 – 1750." Mr. Stephen, known heretofore as a literary essayist and brilliant writer, has here boldly addressed himself to a great work, in which Mr. Hunt has met with indifferent success, and in which the Rector of Lincoln College has always displayed the hand of a master. His special qualifications for dealing with its religious and philosophical issues are great industry and an easy facility in mastering and condensing the many-sided statements of a controversy into a few intelligible propositions. To this may be added a good, clear, well-formed literary style, which makes his pages bright and readable amid the severest discussions. But the great drawback, and one which impairs this history of thought in the same way in which Gibbon's great work is permanently injured, is that the author is himself a believer neither in Christianity nor in an intelligent Deism, but a disciple in the school of Morley, Martineau, Buckle, and Harrison, who holds that "the mind becomes an accurate reflection of the external universe." He is an "agnostic" philosopher, who puts aside all faith in the supernatural, who discards the belief in a personal God, who does not even see that the world is directed by an Intelligent Will. If such a writer reduces the highest things in life to Matthew Arnold's principle of "conduct," it follows that the intellect, cut off on the spiritual side from contact with the unseen, and divorced on the human side from the sentiments which unite reason with emotion, becomes merely the cold and formal instrument of human progress, and that the many forces which blend in the shaping of thought, even when evolved chiefly out of present experience, are neglected or overlooked. Mr. Stephen's book is written upon this theory, and is thoroughly vitiated by it. It is common to speak of the eighteenth century as the lumber-room of dreary, theological speculation and impracticable philosophy, but Mr. Stephen's point of view makes it even worse, as concerned chiefly if not only with mere inanities of thought and belief; and yet out of this century came or through it was transmitted the seeds or germs which have made the